



TESTIMONY FROM THE BRISTOL HISTORICAL SOCIETY (BRISTOL CT) REGARDING HOUSE BILL 6659

The Bristol Historical Society (BHS) was incorporated in 1971 for the purpose of preserving the rich heritage of our city. Through programs, seminars and permanent collections, the Society has become a repository of historical periodicals, publications and artifacts that trace our heritage. In 2001, the BHS purchased the City's first high school building, circa 1890, from the City and embarked on a 20 year program of improvements – a sequence that was wholly reliant upon capacity and funding. **The State of Connecticut, the Preservation Alliance, and the CT Humanities all played pivotal roles in guiding this process.**

Following years of thoughtful planning, all code compliance and accessibility issues had been addressed. Thanks to these levels of support, this building is now fully restored with 2 permanent exhibits, a library and research area, **as well home to two other independent 501c3 non-profit museums: the Memorial Military Museum and the Bristol Sports Hall of Fame.** Both groups are committed to working toward the goal of creating a community cultural center that will be an anchor in the neighborhood and provide a critical linkage to other museums in the region.

Smaller organizations such as the BHS would greatly benefit from consistent funding opportunities in order **to improve long-term planning and sustainability and maximize the return on the state's investment.** To date, the State of Connecticut contributed \$200,000 toward BHS's first phase, and over \$300,000 in DECD Historic Restoration Funds for a new boiler system and a new roof as well as revenue from the Neighborhood Assistance Act program at DRS. Partnering with Preservation Alliance, we also received Technical Assistance planning grants, services from the Circuit Rider, and links to other funding opportunities like the 1772 Foundation. **Rolling back the funding levels for these vital historical, cultural and tourism initiatives is disappointing, especially in light of the current budget surplus and significant financial resources available.**

If the Roadmap had been in place back in 2001, this transformation of this historic structure most likely would not have taken 20 years to accomplish. We had previously submitted testimony in favor of HB 6692, which **would fully support tourism and**

cultural organizations in making Connecticut a more attractive place to visit, work, and live.

Lastly, we are the benevolent caretakers of not only this historic structure itself, but of the oral and written histories of our community and its rich industrial, sports, and military heritage. Without the BHS, the City of Bristol would not have a voice to link the stories through successive generations. **As the home to ESPN, it is interesting to see a new “history” for a new generation unfold, which will consist of satellite dishes and digital centers, as opposed to smokestacks and assembly lines.**

We encourage the Committee to take appropriate budget action to **ensure that the State is a reliable and responsive partner to the arts and tourism industry by ensuring that funds are available and distributed equitably so that Connecticut may compete with our neighboring states for visitors and tourism dollars.**